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Title	Beyond the Screen: Emerging Cinema and Engaging Audiences, by Sarah Atkinson
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Publication date	2015-06-01
Original Citation	Wroot, J. (2015) Beyond the Screen: Emerging Cinema and Engaging Audiences, by Sarah Atkinson. Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media, 9. https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.9.10
Type of publication	Review
Link to publisher's version	10.33178/alpha.9.10
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Download date	2026-11-06 18:26:32
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/5912

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JOURNAL OF FILM AND SCREEN MEDIA

***Beyond the Screen: Emerging Cinema and Engaging Audiences*. Sarah Atkinson. London: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2014 (312 pages). ISBN: 9781623568238.**

A Review by Jonathan Wroot, University of Worcester

Sarah Atkinson's book is a sign of things to come. A dizzying amount of case studies have been documented in this overview of media texts and viewing platforms, which are becoming prolific because of online exhibition outlets, from iTunes to social media and Google Glass. These viewing platforms are not yet as entrenched as theatrical releases, DVD, Blu-ray, or Netflix, but that only signifies the importance of studying them. Atkinson has documented cutting-edge developments in exhibition and distribution in order to demonstrate how audiences might interact with media narratives in the future. However, the book's case studies generate problems that highlight the impact of these developments on media studies. Atkinson often tries to incorporate existing concepts and terms, such as *syuzhet*, *fabula* and paratext, which are not easily adapted to describe features of the texts that she has studied. Newer terms that the author introduces, such as "diegetic portals" (211), provide interesting perspectives on certain media, though they are similar to "paratexts" and other established terms. Therefore, Atkinson's book does not have all the answers, but does contain some valuable perspectives. This is important because it is these concepts and theories (both adapted and new) that will be debated within media studies in the coming years.

Atkinson's cue is taken from recent industry developments, and rightly so. James Cameron's 3D camera technologies and Steven Spielberg's belief that the cinema screen itself needs to be superseded within future entertainment are points that are emphasised in her first chapter. Atkinson's study is also a natural progression from Julia Knight and Peter Thomas's *Reaching Audiences*, an important first step in charting the most recent activities of independent, underground and art-house moving-image distributors and in theorising their wider implications for the UK media industry. By going further into the digital realm, Atkinson briefly debates the potential redundancy of film studies concepts, such as the use of formalist language. Nonetheless, her ultimate intention is to map the different levels of interaction that new media formats potentially allow in their latest forms—from the omnidiegetic, to the extratextual, the extradiegetic, the intradiegetic and the hypodiegetic (6).

These fluid categorisations have previously been problematic for Jonathan Gray and other scholars. Gray adapts Gérard Genette's term paratext to illustrate means by which viewers interact with a central text (such as a book or a film). These means have multiplied in the twenty-first century mainly because of promotional materials, which now take the form of websites, advertisements, trailers, social media feeds, apps, and numerous other platforms. Genette identifies multiple types of paratext, not all of which are immediately applicable to developments since the publication of his ideas. Gray has attempted to update this concept,

but does not factor in whether or not consumers actively pursue a central text through these different types of paratexts, or if they only interact with the paratextual material.

These possibilities have instead been explored by other authors, such as Rayna Denison, Barbara Klinger, Keith M. Johnston and John Caldwell. Denison concludes that every DVD release of a media text, such as a film or TV show related to the *Superman* franchise, should be regarded as a new version of that text, because of the new viewing experiences that are often prompted by it. This builds on the possibilities charted by Klinger, who also details developments in home media formats, as well as online fan interactions (through parody and pastiche videos). Johnston has made the case for film trailers to be studied as independent media texts that have their own conventions and history, which can reveal much about the history of media industries. Caldwell's research also ties to these conclusions, as his study is focused on the perspective of developments within Hollywood studios and production companies. As new developments and platforms have increased, from DVDs to websites and social media interactions, the studios' efforts to exert control over them have likewise expanded in order to capitalise on their lucrative possibilities. Despite these commercial trappings, the production of ancillary materials and promotional media has increased exponentially, as has audience interaction with them. Atkinson does briefly refer to most of these existing studies, but does not fully outline them as the basis from which to draw conclusions for future developments. Instead, she states that she will often refer back to paratextual frameworks, as well as much older formalist terminology in relation to newly discovered media characteristics, stemming from concepts such as *syuzhet* and *fabula* (6–8). While this allows for some interesting insights, Atkinson's near dismissal of important work in new media formats means that she does not discuss prior conclusions that could further her own.

This omission is evident when she abandons references to different categories of diegetic interaction by the end of Chapter Two (though she returns to explicitly using and outlining specific terms in Chapter Seven). Atkinson charts the evolution of promotional activity into its own interactive experience. The examples of *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999), *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2008), *The Dark Knight* (Christopher Nolan, 2008) and *District 9* (Neill Blomkamp, 2009) are key because Alternative Reality Games (ARGs) were used in their promotion. These have now become a popular means of narrative interaction, as actions and explorations from online users are required to progress a particular story, or decide on how it ends. In contrast, the expansion of promotional activities has also diverged into physical experiences, as demonstrated by the company Secret Cinema. Large communities of fans now specifically seek out immersive events as part of their film-viewing experience, mainly because Secret Cinema aims to recreate scenes and settings from popular films. Atkinson refers to such behaviour as a "collective cinematic experience" (52), and does not add a diegetic categorisation until her final chapters. This makes each chapter a useful exploration of recent developments in promotional activities and online media experiences, while the reader retains the option of considering Atkinson's conceptualisations in later sections.

Chapter Three is an important exploration of the impact of mobile technology on filmmaking and its distribution, which does not limit its findings through the use of paratextual classifications. In fact, Atkinson makes excellent use of a quote from Stephen Heath to contextualise her overview of how narrative storytelling has been shaped into smartphone and tablet technologies: "In the first moments of the history of cinema, it is the

technology which provides the immediate interest: what is promoted and sold is the experience of the machine, the apparatus" (221). Such words remind the reader that some things have not changed since the early days of cinema—it is often the technology that is used to market and promote contemporary texts, as much as it was in the 1890s and 1900s. The research in this chapter could therefore be seen as a progression from the work of Tom Gunning, specifically in "The Cinema of Attractions". However, Atkinson's conclusions go further, by implying that current technology could both see the end of big-screen cinema exhibition, and the widespread arrival of new media exhibition and consumption practices.

The role of discussion and social interaction within media consumption and experiences—as a result of current digital developments—is detailed in Chapter Four. The main digital influence is seen to be social media and this helps tie together threads from the previous chapters (without coming to a premature conclusion of the book overall). Atkinson usefully provides context by way of viral TV marketing campaigns and different types of web series that have appeared on platforms such as YouTube. Without these established practices, now common in twenty-first century digital communities, experimental projects (such as the chapter's case studies) would not be possible. *The Inside Experience* (DJ Caruso, 2011) encouraged discussion of the narrative and interaction with the characters through social media (primarily Facebook) in order to further the plot. Even though there were only a finite number of outcomes for the story, the peril faced by Christina Perasso (Emmy Rossum) was enthusiastically followed and two sequels were made—*The Beauty Inside* (Drake Doremus 2012) and *The Power Inside* (Will Speck and Josh Gordon, 2013). On the back of such success, other experimental narratives fuelled by social media followers have been launched. *Cloud Chamber* (Christian Fonnesbech, 2013) is novel in that it sets its interactive environment within the fictional setting of an interstellar experiment, meaning that gains in social media platforms lead to progressions in the cosmic explorations and conspiracy theories at the heart of the constructed narrative. However, Atkinson does state in Chapter Three that these experimental texts are often only consumed by one per cent of Internet users. The challenge for creators of these online experiments is to maintain this niche market's interest, and to expand upon it by attracting other users.

An often-ignored aspect of these developments is then addressed in Chapter Five—the ethics of these new media formats. Textual models that rely on audience interaction and immersion in an alternative reality have the potential to produce unintended consequences. Atkinson attempts to provide parallels between contemporary ARGs and notorious instances such as Orson Welles's 1938 radio play of *The War of The Worlds* (142). Many newer story-based media, such as those detailed in Chapter Four, rely on the audience escaping into conspiracy theory narratives and fictional experiments gone wrong. The producers of these texts aim to make the settings to their stories as realistic as possible, and may even encourage misinterpretation for marketing and promotional purposes. These characteristics may also appeal to other institutions and companies that aim to recreate such scenarios and attract online audiences, such as activist groups and news broadcasters. An extreme example that Atkinson mentions is the website *Collapsus.com*, which attempts to give a stylised, bite-sized view of current day events around the world. As always, though, these experiments rely on the audience's willingness to interact with them.

But what about what happens when audiences do interact? By relying so much on audience interaction to fuel and progress narratives and story structures, should the creators of these new texts charge their consumers? How else would they be rewarded for their

efforts? To recognise the role that audiences can now play within these media texts, different methods of cocreation and cooption are emerging between producers and consumers (as detailed in Chapter Six). The main focus is on crowdsourcing and crowdfunding through the respective examples of Kickstarter in relation to Nicolas Alcala's *The Cosmonaut* (2011) and transmedia storytelling (through data-gathering websites and programs, such as Conducttr). However, numerous other types of programs and texts are also mentioned by Atkinson in this chapter. The result of these examples is a demonstration of how newer models of distribution and exhibition are rapidly emerging. This reinforces the conclusions of Knight and Thomas, David Bordwell, and Dina Iordanova and Stuart Cunningham, who established that there was a need for focused scholarship on distribution processes.

Chapter Seven sees Atkinson return to attempting to classify and categorise the different media production and consumption behaviours charted throughout the book. At first, she simply recharts the examples and patterns from the previous chapters. This is done by identifying particular patterns of genres and themes that are popular within emerging media narrative texts. While it will be interesting to see if such patterns will continue as these texts evolve, there are few new conclusions made in the chapter's summary of these trends. Different diegetic levels and paratextual frameworks are again used frequently. The only new perspective is Atkinson's concept of diegetic portals, which is a means of defining ancillary texts that relate to a central text, such as a film or TV show. This term is transposed on to some of the case studies, as well as on to wider promotional trends (such as viral marketing, and the use of social media to distribute trailers and other marketing material)—which makes "diegetic portal" very similar to Genette's "paratext". The chapter is ultimately left open-ended as to whether researchers should think about these media texts in the context of existing media studies terms, or if a new conceptual vocabulary is required.

As mentioned at the start of this review, this open ending highlights the significance of Atkinson's work. It emphasises the need for new conceptual categories and behaviour to be debated and discussed in media studies, due to the emerging forms of media texts that are appearing in the digital realm. Atkinson's current reliance on paratextual frameworks, and the concept of the diegetic portal, bears too much similarity to existing perspectives that are rooted in the work of Genette and Gray. Media consumption may be headed to, or has already reached, the point at which audiences often only interact with paratexts and not their core texts. Therefore, is the question not: which texts are paratexts? The epilogue to Atkinson's book reemphasises the need for these conceptual debates, as she introduces further case studies of experimental technological developments (such as Google Glass, 4D, and the reproduction of props from films such as *eXistenZ* [David Cronenberg, 1999] as marketing materials). In these last few pages, Atkinson's message becomes overwhelmingly clear—scholars of film and media need to rapidly catch up with the ever-changing digital world they are studying.

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Suggested Citation

Wroot, Jonathan. "*Beyond the Screen: Emerging Cinema and Engaging Audiences* by Sarah Atkinson." Book review. *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media* 9 (Summer 2015). Web. ISSN: 2009-4078.

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